

THE GALTON LECTURE

THERE was a large gathering of Fellows and Members of the *Eugenics Society* and their guests at Manson House on February 16th, to hear the Galton Lecture for 1943, which, under the title "Eugenic Aspects of Children's Allowances," was delivered by Sir William Beveridge, with Lord Horder, President of the *Eugenics Society*, in the chair.

Introducing the lecturer Lord Horder said: "Knowing how deeply Sir William Beveridge is immersed in affairs connected with his Report and how numerous his speaking commitments must be, it may seem an act of great courage on the part of the Council of the *Eugenics Society* to invite Sir William here to-day. But the Council did not underestimate the status of the Galton Lecture and therefore did not hesitate to approach him. Its courage has been rewarded."

He then called upon Sir William to deliver his lecture, which is published in full elsewhere in this issue.

At its conclusion, Lord Horder reminded the audience that the Galton Lecture was not usually followed by speeches, but on this occasion the Council thought a compromise might be feasible if they could impose it on Sir William Beveridge, namely, that members of the audience should be permitted to ask questions. As a chairman of some experience, he was fully aware that some happy individuals could ask a question and sit down again, while others could not. He begged questioners not to turn a question into a speech, although a question sometimes required a statement of the grounds on which it was asked.

He thought it was his privilege as Chairman and as President of the *Society* to put Sir William wise on the question of the *Society's* policy on the matter of children's allowances and taxation rebate. Whilst admiring Professor Fisher's research work they did not always take his views on eugenic matters. The *EUGENICS REVIEW* was a medium for the expression of views in

general on eugenic topics, but a good many of those views were not necessarily the views of the *Society* with respect to its policy. The editor generally headed his review with a comment to that effect. "In the statement of the aims and objects of the *Society* there occurs this passage:

Many other social measures have been suggested to reduce or remove the expense and inconveniences of rearing children. Amongst them may be considered family allowances. These might be arranged by graded equalization of the pools or other methods which would provide relief for parents in the higher occupational groups as well as in the lower. Taxation rebates for the children might be allowed on a scale which would influence fertility.

It is obvious, therefore that the *Society* endorses Sir William Beveridge's views on these points."

No doubt there would be questions as to Sir William's use of the word "inversion," suggesting, as a major premise, that there was a top and a bottom in regard to biological human material. Perhaps there would also be a question on the words "biological failure" as a synonym for infertility. Lord Horder said finally that he thought they all agreed with Sir William that eugenic measures constituted, by their very nature, a long-term policy. The *Eugenics Society* was not perhaps as popular as it would be if it held that the ideals of eugenicists could be achieved in one generation.

MR. CECIL BINNEY asked whether Sir William did not think that in the case of professional people who had never had to contribute at all, the possible inducement of children's allowances would be greatly offset by having to find 7s. 6d. a week, plus the unspecified addition to the income tax. Would not this diminish rather than encourage fertility? In the second place, had he contemplated how these weekly contributions of 7s. 6d. were to be collected from such people? In view of his remarks about income-

tax rebates, had he altered his views concerning paragraph 422 of his Report, in which he said :

“ In so far as it appears that children's allowances to all families irrespective of their means would mean giving money to prosperous people without need, this can be corrected by an adjustment of the rebates in income tax now allowed for children.”

His other question was why, if there had to be vocational provision, it should be left to the professions to do it on their own ?

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE replied that he had not got his Report in his hands, but he thought it would be found that what it stated was that in Class II, where there was no employer, the contributions otherwise paid by the employer and employee would take the form of a single security contribution. Persons in that class would receive pension on retirement, medical treatment, funeral expenses, but no disability benefit during the first thirteen weeks of disability, and no unemployment benefit. Their total contribution was 4s. 3d. He did not know that the amount was very important. They would get something for that, namely the benefits he had just enumerated. He agreed that 8s. for each child was not going to be much of an encouragement to professional people. That was why he wanted in addition occupational allowances. On the income tax question, when he wrote his Report he was not concerned with eugenics at all. He had to deal with the argument of some people who said that children's allowances should have an income limit. For a number of reasons, partly administrative, and partly those of justice, he saw great objections to any kind of income limit in this scheme. If it was thought that one ought not to give money for the children of the rich, one should make the adjustment in an income-tax rebate. But now he had a eugenic reason for giving more money—as much more as he could—for children of the more wealthy classes. He had not changed his opinion since writing his Report ; he had merely changed his approach to the subject. As for vocational

allowances, he did not think that such schemes were any substitute for the statutory children's allowances. They could not cover the whole population ; the first step to neutralizing the premium on infertility was by a general scheme covering the whole population. The children's allowances set out in his Report neutralized only up to subsistence level. Whether vocational schemes should be compulsory or not was again a matter on which he had no final views. If he were in charge of the civil service he would make them compulsory on the whole service. If he were in charge of an educational system he would apply it throughout the whole system, but it might be that in some places it could be on voluntary lines.

CAPTAIN OLLIVER asked whether Sir William realized his vast responsibility in stressing the need on the part of the people of the will to work, the need of compulsion for the work-shy, and the need of inspection in homes in order to discover whether this extra money was spent in the right way. How would he ensure that family allowances were not spent on cinemas and “ perms ” ?

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE replied that he knew nothing which would save any person from having married the wrong husband or the wrong wife or from having chosen the wrong father or mother. But he was a sufficient believer in his kind not to agree to the idea which had been presented to him, that any assistance of this nature should not be given in money but in goods because the people could not be trusted to spend the money properly. He had no wish to say to them : “ If I give you money for food you might use it for something else, and therefore I am going to give you a benefaction in kind.” He did not want that kind of interference. It appeared to him that the questioner was expecting him to talk about social insurance, and his subject that evening had been strictly children's allowances. But so far as the will to work was concerned, he believed that the one thing which people were really anxious about was to have a certain chance of work after this war. Of course, there were some people lazy by

nature, and most of us could be made lazy in suitable economic circumstances. But there was nothing whatever in his scheme to increase the premium on idleness. In the first place, most of his scheme had nothing to do with unemployment at all. It was a scheme very largely for pensions, sickness, medical treatment and other benefits. The unemployment expenditure was only one-eighth of the total, or little more than the expenditure incurred under this head before the war. It amounted to £105 millions as compared with £90 millions just before this war. He was not proposing any change in the present rules regarding unemployment benefit, and he had put in his Report the obligation of people not merely to accept the work they wanted but the kind of work which wanted doing. He had done everything he could to meet the point of view put forward by the last questioner, but he did want him to realize that there was very little in this Report about unemployment. It dealt mainly with children, sickness, and old age.

MR. TITMUSS asked whether it was not a fact that Professor Fisher's conclusions on the differential birth rate were based on the 1911 census report and that since then, under the impact of two wars, the birth rate of the skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled had probably fallen by at least 50 per cent and that the relative rates of these classes were altered?

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE said that he was afraid he did not know what the latest figures were. All birth rates had fallen, but he did not know that there had been a return to class equality as between the labourer and the skilled man, or the skilled man and the professional man. He would be very much surprised if that change had taken place.

THE HON. MRS. GRANT DUFF asked whether Sir William and the *Eugenics Society* would consider a plan of family allowances on such a scale as would make a very great eugenic difference even in the present generation. She was not content to wait 200 years before the effect was manifest. She wanted to see a great improvement throughout the population at once.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE: That is a question of nurture, not of nature.

MRS. GRANT DUFF said that if a child were starved in its youth it did not grow to full stature, and it was by such children that the race was harmed even in one generation.

THE CHAIRMAN asked whether eugenic differences could arise in one generation.

MRS. GRANT DUFF suggested that they could, as, for example, by the relief of starvation and by measures to combat syphilis.

DR. COLLIER asked whether children's allowances would apply to adopted children, also whether Sir William supposed that the rate of allowances suggested would be sufficient to induce any large number of people to adopt orphans and so diminish the tragedy of children without homes.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE replied that the children's allowances which he proposed, 8s. a week, did apply to every child, whether adopted or not. Some children had no natural parents, and he hoped that with this 8s. most of such children would find a home. But he was not sure that all would do so, and in so far as they did not there would have to be some scheme for looking after orphans. The community must have a public body which saw that orphans were cared for.

MR. BRANDER said that many people were agreed that the scheme would tend to produce a large crop not only of children of the better class, but of slum children. Had Sir William considered what happened under the Speenhamland scheme of 150 years ago, which, instead of producing more children of the better class, produced a number of children of the lower eugenic standard? He mentioned his own city of Glasgow, where one quarter of the population were Roman Catholics, and where the spiritual leaders of that community were urging their faithful followers to produce as many children as possible and were quite hostile to family planning. He had not seen any consideration of this difficulty in any of the official expositions of the Beveridge scheme.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE said that he did not think that historically it was the case that the Speenhamland experiment had

caused a large number of children to be born who would not have been born otherwise. It did not go on long enough for that purpose. Under a scheme of universal stepping up of wages the result would be that the advantage to everybody would be *nil*. What he was proposing was that for every child born there should be a subsistence allowance. In other words, that a child should not impoverish the parents. That did not make it profitable for parents to have children in any event. They were no better off than before and they had all the added trouble of the children. He did not see how this was going to affect the number of people who made the slums. It was only going to appeal to people who might be thinking: "We should like to have another child, but we have not enough income to have another child and do justice to the child we have already."

DR. CAMPS asked whether Sir William's researches had quite convinced him that equality of opportunity was going to be a eugenic advantage. Was he quite convinced that he had given an adequate allowance for voluntary effort? Was there not some inconsistency between compulsion at the top and freedom at the bottom?

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE said that he did not understand the second question. As to the equality of opportunity, his argument was substantially taken from Professor Fisher. If there was inequality of opportunity as between the large and the small family there was social promotion of the child of the small family, and if infertility was inheritable this meant that one would get in the upper social classes a larger proportion of relatively infertile stock. If that argument was sound—and he did not see any logical flaw in it—then by equalizing opportunity between members of large and of small families one would stop the promotion of infertility. He was not saying anything about equality of opportunity as between rich and poor, but as between large and small families. Moreover, he was speaking only of economic opportunity. He did not deny there were certain social values in belonging to a large family. That was an additional reason for trying to remove the

existing economic disadvantage which membership of a large family entailed.

MRS. WESTBROOK asked whether it was only for financial reasons that Sir William did not subsidize the first child.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE replied that in his Report he was concerned with the abolition of want. That was the whole basis of it. It was difficult to maintain that it was necessary to give anything for the first child of the family, so long as the responsible parent was earning, in order to ensure that that family was not in want. Broadly speaking, there could be very few people who had not got enough income, when earning, for themselves, their wife, and one child. If the actual surveys on poverty in different towns made between the two wars were studied, it would be found that practically no cases of poverty due to the wages being insufficient for man, wife, and one child were found. Wages pretty well everywhere were up to that level. Therefore, if money were given for the first child of a parent in work, it was given when it was not necessary for the abolition of want. A great deal was saved by not giving anything for the first child, and that money was available for medical and other services. Again, he was not thinking of eugenics but of the relief of want. He thought that the cost of children ought not to be borne wholly by the parents or by the State. Some people, if the amount were 9s. per week, would say: "Let the State pay 5s. and the parents 4s." He did not like that way of sharing. He preferred to say that the parents should pay for the first child, and that the charge on the State should rise with the size of the family. That was a direct incentive to a larger family.

DR. C. P. BLACKER asked whether a certain amount of contention might perhaps be raised by compressing under one head two kinds of infertility which could be remedied by family allowances. People could be fertile or infertile for either of two reasons. They could be involuntarily infertile or deliberately infertile, and it was only infertility of the second character which could be removed by economic measures.

SIR WILLIAM BEVERIDGE replied that the whole of his argument was on the other line,

that certain people did vary in their degree of natural physical fertility. If people were promoted into the upper social class because they were infertile, they would be likely to marry into that same class, and thus there would be a breeding out of ability. This could be corrected by checking the promotion of people merely because they were infertile. There were in this matter temperamental and moral factors, but in so far as these

characteristics were inherited, as no doubt they were, he did not feel that there was any real difference between them and the physical characteristics. It would make no difference to the eugenic argument.

On the motion of the Chairman, a very hearty vote of thanks was accorded to Sir William Beveridge for his lecture and for his replies to questions.

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